



What's Up With Angels?

What Is the Fourth Advent Candle All About?

The other day I was pondering something I saw in the Bible, and I wondered why God created angels. I can see to some degree what the point was for making people, to have a relationship with them but then what did angels offer him that people didn't? The term translated angel in the Bible simply means messenger which may have more to do with the relationship angels commonly have with people than what sort of beings they are or how they are in relation to God. Honestly, I cannot say with any great conviction why people exist; I don't think they offer a tremendous amount of value to God's life...in fact you might have to admit they have cost Him more than they have benefitted Him. For that matter, you would be hard pressed to come up with a great explanation for His developing cockroaches, poison oak, mosquitoes, and squid. You can offer a guess and you might be right, but you cannot be certain you are because there is an infinitely greater expanse of God's calculating to consider than we can comprehend. All we can offer is that God chose to make people and angels for some reason, and they are both a part of His magnificent way of seeing life and wanting it to exist.

There is a rarely considered point made in the book of Hebrews regarding angels that few, if any of us give much thought. **Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.** (Hebrews 13: 2 NIV) Now what did the Apostle Paul mean by that? Was he warning us to be careful because there are angels all around us who only seem to be people or simply referring to the times mentioned in the Bible of angels showing up and not being immediately recognized as angels? It happened with the great man of faith Abraham. What he thought were three men walked into Abraham's encampment and he scurried about to try and find food to offer them like he would any stranger who might be passing through the region. **Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way — now that you have come to your servant." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say."** (Genesis 18:2-5 NIV)

Later Abraham realized that one of the three "men" was the Lord and the other two were angels given the task of rescuing from the wicked city of Sodom any righteous people they found there before destroying it. The earliest recorded account of an angel was when Sarah's servant girl, who became pregnant with Sarah's husband Abraham at the insistence of Sarah herself, fled Sarah because of Sarah's near violent jealousy of Hagar and the child she carried in the womb. Stranded out in the desert without food or water, Hagar was facing near certain death when the angel came to her. It must be noted that there was nothing unusual about the angel that made Hagar flinch at the sight. **The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered.** (Genesis 16: 7-8 NIV) It was later when the angel prophesied to Hagar the future of the child she was bearing that she realized a supernatural being had come to her.

The same sort of meeting happened with Gideon who was working in the field. **The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites.** (Judges 6: 11 NIV) The entire time Gideon and the angel talked, Gideon just seemed to think it was a man speaking with him. It was only after the angel miraculously used his staff to cause fire to spring out of a rock and consume some bread and meat Gideon had brought to provide the angel with lunch that Gideon realized what sort of being was there. Most of the time though angels are clearly supernatural. An angel speaks to Moses out of a fire. One comes to the future mother of Samson who she reported to her husband looked “awesome” and not awesome like cool but awesome like spine tingling unearthly. An angel in a cloud during the day and in fire in the sky at night led Israel out of Egypt and through the desert. Angels in the book of Revelation would give you goosebumps and cause you to quiver in fear. There are angels who look perfectly normal, just like humans and those who are terrifying. Angels bring destruction and they provide help. An angel annihilates 180,000 invading Assyrian soldiers and one brings a deadly plague to Israel. An angel rescues the Apostle Peter from prison and an angel brings comfort to Jesus as He in agony prayed at the Garden of Gethsemane. It is an angel that kept Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from being touched by the flames in the fiery furnace and one prevented hungry lions from harming Daniel in the lion’s den.

Angels sometimes come as strange apparitions and other times look like any person you might meet in the park. Angels bring comfort and destruction. They warn and provide “good news of great joy”. The fourth Sunday of Advent is a time to remember the coming of angels to Zechariah the father of John the Baptist, to Mary the mother of Jesus, to Joseph and to the shepherds out in the field the night Jesus was born. We know the angels weren’t God although God did show up at times with angels. When John the Apostle faced an angel while imprisoned on the Island of Patmos, the angel stopped him from falling at his feet in worship. **Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!**" (Revelation 22: 9 NIV)

You may feel as though if an angel spoke to you, you could do great things for God. You would be faithful like Moses or good like Mary. You would do courageous things like Daniel or Peter. We want great miracles and exciting signs to drive us, but angels are rare in the Bible and how many in this room have ever seen one? None I imagine. Courage and faith and love are not the products of supernatural beings showing up, of wonders from heaven. They are what ordinary people like you and I do who have Jesus Christ living within them. Christianity is not a religion of angels; it is a life of faith in Christ as Savior. Everything about Christmas is the coming of the Savior. He is at the center of why we believe we can be good, holy and faithful. The angel who reassured Joseph put it this way regarding what this child means to you and me. **“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”** (Matthew 1: 21 NIV)

Recently, in Kentucky there were horrifying tornadoes that ravaged the countryside. One young family hid in their bathroom where there were no windows to be blown in by the pressure the tornado could generate. Somehow a tornado tore off the roof and carried one of the children up in it. As it spun her around, the seven year old said she asked Jesus to take care of her. Suddenly the child said Jesus spit her out, the tornado spit her out onto the mud. That is one way for salvation to happen. Another, and the most important by far, is for Jesus to take your sins out of you and give you eternal life. This little girl boldly announced to any who would listen that Jesus saved her. You can be as brave as she is. Make the announcement this Christmas. Jesus Christ is your Savior. He truly is now and forever more, the “Prince of Peace”. Say it. Proclaim. Announce it to the part of the world you have been given. Jesus is the Savior of the world.